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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8852
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2008

In Today's Papers

Istanbul Governor Warns against May 1 Rally in Taksim
All media outlets report Istanbul Governor Guler told the press Monday he would not allow the labor unions to rally in Taksim Square in the heart of Istanbul on May 1 because they had received tip offs for armed attacks on the demonstrators. Guler warned police would use force to stop the demonstrators from entering Taksim. Papers recall Guler was criticized for police brutality during last year's May 1 demonstrations and blame the governor for instructing police to beat the workers again this year. Liberal Radikal says labor unions will defy Guler, and insist on using their "constitutional and international rights" to stage peaceful demonstrations. Prime Minister Erdogan will hold a meeting with labor union representatives today, papers report.

Babacan: Turkish Meetings with Northern Iraq to Intensify
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said that Turkish meetings with the Kurdish Regional Administration (KRG) representatives in northern Iraq would intensify. "You might expect more contacts at different levels with the administration in northern Iraq," said Babacan, stressing such dialogue would be important both for the fight against the PKK and the economic relations with Iraq. Papers expect Turkey's special Iraq envoy Ambassador Murat Ozcellik to travel to northern Iraq soon to meet KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Liberal Radikal claims Ozcellik would also meet with KRG President Massoud Barzani.

Ankara Wants to Host Middle East Peace Summit
All papers report in a press conference on Monday, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said Turkey would play an intermediate for a while in the talks between Israel and Syria. At this stage there are no plans to bring together officials of the two countries, Babacan said, adding Turkey would continue to act as an intermediate to encourage the sides to restart direct negotiations. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak claims Ankara wants to host a Middle

East summit. Babacan added diplomatic efforts had been continuing for a year, and noted that both sides had asked Turkey for help. Meanwhile, Radikal and Yeni Safak cite the Israeli daily Haaretz' report that Prime Minister Erdogan would send his foreign policy advisor, Ahmet Davutoglu, to Jerusalem to brief Prime Minister Olmert about the PM's talks with President Asad. Haaretz cites a source in Jerusalem who claims that Turkey is seeking a compromise that would allow peace talks between Israel and Syria to begin.

Columnist Akif Emre wonders about Turkey's enthusiasm in Islamist Yeni Safak: "Both the government and media are drawing an enthusiastic picture of a Syria-Israel peace without even considering whether the conditions are right to accomplish this goal. Syria should be the most enthusiastic one about this peace initiative given Israeli military supremacy over Syria and Iran. On the other hand, Syria has strategic relations with Iran and supports Hizbullah. Without the armed resistance of Hizbullah, Israel would probably never think about a peace deal with Syria. We shall see who and what will be 'sold' by the Asad administration in exchange for peace with Israel. As for Israel, a peace deal with Syria will ensure border security and push Iran out of the regional equilibrium. However, there is also a question mark if Israel, from an internal political dynamics perspective, has enough political will to conclude a peace deal with Syria. And does the US administration have the will to pressure for peace in the Middle East? There is a price for Turkey in all of this as well. Water resources will be one of the most critical aspects in a possible Syria-Israel peace deal. Even if Israel withdraws from the Golan Heights, it will not give up its authority over water resources. And Turkey will have to be asked to supply water either to Israel or to Syria. In other words, Turkey, while being a mediator, will end up paying the water bill."

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Editorial Opinion on Afghanistan:

"Afghanistan: A New Iraq?"

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet (4/29): "The recent assassination attempt against Afghan President Karzai indicates that the country is becoming another Iraq when it comes to security and stability. This was the fourth armed attack against Karzai in his seven year term, and it may not be the last. The fact is that those who are against the Afghani regime are capable enough to attack the president at the very heart of country's capital city. The Taliban gained a psychological victory with this attack. After gaining full control over the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, they have started to attack in the cities. The situation in Kabul is a serious blow against the US and its allies. The reason for the US invasion was to save Afghanistan from the archaic Taliban regime. Seven years later, the mission seems unaccomplished, and the Taliban seems to be resurrecting everywhere, even in the capital city. Since the majority of coalition forces do not have combat roles, the Taliban can operate rather freely. Unless the international community moves towards a more significant presence in Afghanistan, things will continue to work in favor of Taliban."

Norway Does not Support PKK

Liberal Radikal and tabloid Aksam report that Norwegian Foreign Minister Stoere is coming to Ankara tomorrow to improve tense relations between Norway and Turkey. Responding to questions from Turkish press prior to his visit, FM Stoere said "Turkey is our NATO ally and has a significant geo-politic importance. Turkey is like a bridge uniting a diversity of religions, cultures and customs. We have joint views under the NATO umbrella. We have a good dialog based on mutual respect and we want to continue this dialog." Responding to a question on the PKK, Stoere said "We don't call the PKK a terrorist organization because we accept the UN's terrorist list, not with the EU's. Before defining an organization, we prefer to follow its activities and then decide. We never supported the PKK. We are Turkey's ally and close to Turkey, not the PKK".

Provocation in Sakarya

All papers report that tensions escalated in northwestern province Sakarya on Sunday when about one thousand nationalists attempted to raid a gathering organized by the DTP. Mainstream Sabah reports that around 800 people attending DTP's "peace and brotherhood night"

remained locked in a wedding hall for seven hours. One person at the age of 65 died of heart attack in the hall.

Military Court Releases DTP Chairman Nurettin Demirtas
Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Yeni Safak, Vatan, and others: A military court released 52 people including DTP Chairman Nurettin Demirtas in the court case on charges of producing fake health documents to evade military service, pending trial.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Labor unions insist on celebrating May Day in Taksim Square despite warnings by Istanbul Governor that Taksim would not be open to rallies.
- A court in Istanbul said Monday Trabzon police officials erased the records of the phone conversations made by Erhan Tuncel, a key suspect in the murder of Armenian Turkish journalist Hrant Dink.
- The Chief of the military General Staff (TGS) Yasar Buyukanit said the soldiers killed by terrorists increased the military's determination to combat terror.

International News

- The Financial Times writes Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, has

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failed to implement further reforms and is locked in arm-wrestling with the judiciary.

- More than 700 antiquities stolen during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were returned to the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad. The museum remains closed to the public due to the violence and lack of security.

- Israel says it has launched a new communications satellite from Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

WILSON